Selection and/or Election

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Question:

The Prophet Mohammad, (pbuh), upon his last pilgrimage, appointed Hazrat Ali as his successor.

Why was he not elected later on?

Answer:

In my opinion, this is a very fundamental question.

The whole of Shi'ism can be found in the answer. In other words, it is a very delicate issue and one should not give a brief reply. I will try, as far as is possible, within the limitation of time and place, to clarify the point. I just want to emphasize that this is my own personal point of view. When we are dealing with the reality and the Truth of religion, we must reflect more and give them careful consideration .

This problem is really a fundamental one. When we look at the collection of reasons which our Sunni brothers present in confirming their point of view after the Prophet of Islam, we find many reasons which seem true and are True. On the other hand, if we look through the eyes of an objective scholar and take into account the reasonings the Shi'ites give to confirm their ideas, we will conclude

that the majority of Shi'ite reasonings also seem correct, deep and firm. Therefore, how is it possible that two groups who think in opposite and contradictory terms which conflict with each other both seem to be right in the arguments they use?

In general terms, the main argument of our Sunni brothers is this:

If anyone should have been appointed after the Prophet of Islam by God, just as the Prophet was obliged to announce and teach the verses of the Qoran clearly, carefully and in a way so that they could not be denied, he also had a duty to show the same care and clarity in announcing the successor who had been appointed by God in order to prevent any plot, rejection, explanation or interpretation which may occur in the future.

But we see that circumstances were such that, after the Prophet, not only did the Emigrants [the people who migrated with the Prophet from Mecca to Medina and who cast their votes for other Caliphs as well] but also the Helpers, that is, the citizens of Medina, gathered in Saqifoh [area belonging to the Sa'ebah tribe] to themselves elect the Caliph.

It becomes clear, then, that all of the Moslems in Medina felt that they should elect the leader among themselves. That is, they should select the Prophet's successor.

Our Sunni brothers, in order to prove their argument, also mention the point that the Prophet, in the last moments of his life, intended to write out a statement clarifying the matter of succession, but because of the protests, he abandoned his intention to write such a statement. Therefore, if he had had the mission to write such an official decree from God, he could not have overlooked it just because this or that person protested or argued against it and so he did not announce that Hazrat Ali had been appointed by God as the Prophet's successor.

Our Sunni brothers also say that although Ali did protest the election of the Caliph and even a few months later did not officially approve the decision, later on he did confirm it and for whatever reason, officially accepted them.

Therefore, if the position of Ali, like that of prophecy, came from God, in no way, form or terms could Ali give his approval to anyone else. Thus he could not officially approve of another person as his own successor.

But the argument of Shi'ism goes like this: The succession to the Prophet differs from a political successor. The Prophet did not just hold a political position, as to lead us to claim to say that he did not have the right to appoint his successor and people should elect the

one who is to govern them, one after another. But the Prophet, as a thinker, master, and teacher was not appointed by the people so that his successor should also be selected by them.

The Prophet was appointed by God. Therefore, even if all of the people do not accept that he is the Prophet and even if not one person gave the Prophet of Islam his vote. still the Prophet of Islam ;R the Prophet of Islam and even if all people were to give their vote to him, his position would not be strengthened in the least way. The fact of the matter is that the station of prophethood is not a popularly, elective office. It is not a power which people give to a person. Thus a Prophet is not an elected individual. It is for this reason that his mission and the continuity of his movement must be put into the hands of a successor who is qualified for the same type of leadership and mission as that of the Prophet himself.

For example, in a city, the mayor of that city takes his power from the people and is elected by them. When he dies or his term ends, the people choose another mayor to replace him. But when a teacher has brought a new school of thought into being where he gives a special class, and no one else can teach that class the way he can, and he has initiated that particular approach, when a group of his students gather around him and have found faith in him, it is the teacher who

recognizes which of his students or friends is most worthy to continue his teaching. A teacher or a professor is not selected from the votes of the people. It is a teacher who selects another teacher and this is a method that all people accept.

If an expert cardiologist is going on a trip, the people cannot hold a referendum to choose another person as a cardiologist. People cannot decide who is an expert in this area and they may select someone who knows nothing about the heart. It is the cardiologist who knows who can perform his job in his absence. It is for this reason that the majority of people, not all of them, listen to his recommendation and approve the person he appoints. This is true all over the world.

Therefore, if the Prophet of Islam had only been a political power, others could select someone as his successor. But he was a moral power and an expert, who was not selected by the people and who had a very special divine mission and had the right to tell the people and appoint for them a person who is most worthy to continue his mission and people have to obey him.

Now, taking these two arguments into consideration, which one should you choose?

In general, Shi'ism believes that after the Prophet, the leadership

of the community should be appointed by the Prophet himself. As the Prophet announced his mission without the permission of the people, built his society and trained individuals, so that after him, his school should be continued by one who is most similar to him, one carefully trained by him, one most familiar with his thoughts and teachings.

But our Sunni brothers believe that the Prophet formed an Islamic society, revealed the Qoran, the book of Islam, and ended his mission. The principles and directives of the Islamic community were fixed. Therefore, after the Prophet, we only need a political and social leader to rule and defend the community and we will select him according to our own discernment.

Which one of these arguments is incorrect and should be rejected?

In my opinion, neither. Both of them are logical and correct.

What a Shitite says complies with wisdom and logic. Even today it is in accordance with social circumstances and with the Traditions of the Prophet.

The Prophet, from the beginning of his mission up until his death, always relied on Ali. Hundreds of cases, occasions and clear examples exist to show that the final opinion and hope of the Prophet was with Ali and his family to continue his mission.

On the other hand, Islam provides for decision making by council.

We see that the Prophet himself in his life-time held councils and even, at times, preferred another's opinion over his own and he did not impose himself upon them.
We saw with the battle of Ohod, the Prophet intended to remain in Medina while the younger people wanted to leave Medina and fight. After a vote, the young people won. The Prophet was in the minority. The Prophet immediately went out and returned armed for battle.

At the battle of Badr there were seven wells. The Prophet camped by the first one. A soldier came and asked him, 'Did you receive a revelation and camp here or was it your own decision ?'

The Prophet answered, 'It was my own decision.'

The soldier then said, 'It would be better for you to camp by the seventh well so that all of the other six wells would be behind the lines.'
The Prophet immediately said, 'You are right,' and he ordered the camp to move to the seventh well so that the enemy would not have tactical access to them.
In the battle of Muteh, the Prophet appointed three commanders,

Jaffar, Zeid ibn Haritha and Abdullah ibn Ravaheh so that if one were killed, the others could take over in succession. When it turned out that all of them were killed and the Prophet had not chosen a fourth leader, the people chose Khaled as their commander. The Prophet accepted the elected.

We see that even knowing the position of the Prophet, he permitted the people to vote and express their opinions. He valued the vote of the majority in social affairs. Thus counsel by council (showra) in Islam is the most important principle in running society, while leadership of a social group is a universal principle. The Traditions (sunnah) of the Prophet show how much importance Mohammad placed in his personal actions on counsel and on yielding to public opinion and the votes of the majority.

On the other hand, the issue of selection by appointment (vesayat), and the Prophet's stress upon particular persons for the continuation of his mission, is one which cannot be denied by either side. People may try to explain it away but no one can deny the essential fact of it.

How can the two contradictory opinions be resolved? On the one hand, we have the principles of the Qoran, the Traditions of the Prophet and the spirit of Islam, reliance on people, public council

and majority votes. On the other hand, we have the person of the Prophet himself, who with respect to the Caliphate and its successorship, specified selection by appointment.

How can we explain why the Prophet, at his last battle, Tabuk, leaves the brave warrior Ali behind in Medina and takes an old Sheykh and the elders, who can no longer fight, with him to battle. During the last days of his life, confined to his bed, he sent an army beyond the north frontier, that is, the second front. He sent all the most important Islamic figures together with his army and put an eighteen year old youth, Osameh, the son of Zeid ibn Harithah, as its head. This was the army and they were sent to the border. Now it is obvious what he was saving Ali for.

The Prophet sends 65 year old men from the elders of Medina and from amongst the Qoraish, under the command of the youth, Osameh, while Ali, who is the greatest of officers, is kept in Medina. What did he have in mind for Ali? What was he keeping him for? Ali was a man of the battlefield, not of the house.

In the Prophet's last moments with all the fervour to press his cause, he sends this army out while aware that he is dying and knowing that Medina will be defenseless without his army. Yet, in spite of all of this, he takes the risk. Why? For Ali to remain alive

For the battle of Tabuk, the Prophet himself, then being 62 years old, accompanied the army. He had to go through hundreds of miles of the most terrible desert to reach there for the second battle. All the Emigrants and his Companions accompanied him except Ali. Ali was kept at home.

A few days later, Ali could stand it no longer. He caught up with the Prophet on the way and asked him, 'Why have you kept me in Medina? People criticize me. They taunt me.

The Prophet turned to him and with particular emphasis said, 'I have left you for what I have left. I have kept you for what I have left behind me.' It becomes clear that Mohammad wanted Ali to remain alive.

On the other hand, it is not logical or acceptable to think that people who had given all they had to the Prophet, people who had sacrificed their whole beings, wealth and prestige in the way of the Prophet and all the Emigrants and Helpers who made so many self-sacrifices and were devoted to the Prophet, should, then, take as their fundamental and absolute principle, the idea of selection by appointment.

That they would take a false principle, which does not exist and with this false principle, destroy the clear right of another and that

all Moslems would confirm this innovation, such a thing is not possible. Then what happened?

That which occurred and generally continued after the Prophet consists of a universal principle that if all of this sentence be completely understood and be made clear, my answer will be finished. (It is something which is the same in all intellectual and social processes.) And that is this that: in order to do away with a right, another right will be cited.

It is always so that in order to do away with a principle in a school of thought, another principle which is also a part of that school of thought will be brought forward. It is not possible to turn believing Moslems away from performing a principle of their religion.

Then how can this be done ? By directing them to another principle which is also part of their religion. For example, if a religious group wants to perform a social action and another group wants to prevent them from doing so, they cannot distract the faithful, whose whole lives have been spent in worship and pilgrimage with, for instance, some jazz music. They will pay absolutely no attention to it.

What do they do? They rely on another principle which exists in their religion and by doing so take their attention away from the first

principle.

Is this point clear or not?

It is possible to prevent spiritual struggle (jihad) through stress upon the ritual prayer but not by dance. The faithful mojahed [one engaged in spiritual struggle], will not leave his or her jihad to go off dancing. But it is possible that they neglect the jihad in order to perform the ritual prayer as a believer may not be aware of neglecting one principle because of devoting too much attention to another.

In order to prevent a social religious action, stress on an individual religious action may stand in the way of performing that social religious action. This is why religious people may deviate by means of a principle which is part of their religion. This is why the principle of selection by appointment or the right to appoint the precise successors, after the Prophet of Islam, who should have been appointed by the Prophet himself and were, in fact, was contradicted by another principle which is the principle of allegiance through popular consensus in public council. This latter principle also exists in Islam, is present in the Qoran, can be found in the Traditions of the Prophet and is not against the spirit of Islam but rather is completely compatible with it.

If the principle of allegiance, counsel and election by the people was false and forged, only five, ten or twenty charlatans would have accepted it, only they would have sought it out, and such a principle would never have been accepted by Islamic society and the great Companions of the Prophet. Then why did the majority of the people not object? Why did they accept it so easily? Because it is an Islamic principle. How can it be then that one Islamic principle contradicts another one? How indeed?

In law, in legal philosophy and in social issues, a principle exists and that is this: Often one principle overrides another one. This also holds in religious precepts. Once when the Prophet had gone on jihad, he instructed his army in the middle of the day to break the fast. Isn't fasting a principle and jihad a principle, as well?

At the battle of Tabuk, against the Romans, the Prophet instructed all of his forces to be saddled up. A trickster, who used the pretext of religion, who sensed a way of getting out of work (it seems that this type of person has increased in Islam these days), went to the Prophet and said, 'I have a weak point which does not allow me to participate in this battle.'

The Prophet asked, 'What is that weak point?'

He said, 'My problem is that my sensibilities are very delicate and

I lose myself in the face of beauty. I am afraid that if I were to go off with you to Tabuk, I would lose myself in front of all those beautiful Roman girls and the devil might tempt me and I would lose my faith. This is why, with your permission, I will not accompany you.'

The Prophet, angered, said, 'Get out of here. Die!' So much did Mohammad despise those who sought to deceive the Prophet by means of Islam.

We see that when that person wanted to get out from under a religious duty, he tried to avoid performance of the first duty by using another religious duty as an excuse. It is not as if he had said, 'I can't go with you because I want to go gambling tonight.' He would hardly have said that.

Therefore, there is always a principle which overrides another one. This is why they show preference for a higher principle in order to be able to adhere to a lower one, both of which are part of this religion.

But here there is another point and that is this that the principle of appointment by selection is the appointment of a successor by means of a leader, in other words, the Prophet. The principle of allegiance and a governing council is the election of a successor by means of the people. Could these two contrary principles really stem from the

same religion? I believe they can. How? What can I cite to prove my point ?

I must explain that Shi'ites, without any doubt, believe that the successors to the Prophet of Islam, who were appointed by the Prophet, are 12 people. We do not believe that there are any more than these. But we know that the Prophet of Islam knew his religion to be the last religion, that is, a religion which humanity would follow forever. How is it that the Prophet first says, 'Islam is an eternal religion' and then, when he wants to appoint a leader for his society, he only chooses 12 people for his society? And this, not forever? He did not say that my progeny, whoever they are and wherever they are, would lead my society forever. He never said such a thing. Imamate is not an endowment for his children. It is only these 12 people in particular, successors who have been marked out and specified by the Prophet.

Now the question arises. Let us suppose that the words and opinions of the Prophet were realized and after the Prophet, 12 successors followed him and led and governed and guided society and history as the Prophet wished. But then what would have happened if no one had been designated? He speaks of no one else. Thus it becomes clear that after the rule of the specified individuals, who

believe that their religion and leadership is eternal, we would have to accept the second principle, that is, the principle of councilor election and allegiance.

Thus, the issue looks like this. There are two historic phases after the Prophet. One is a temporary phase of the 12 leaders of Islamic society. They guide Islamic history in order to foster Islamic society. This is organized by means of 12 particular individuals chosen by the Prophet.

The Prophet remained silent about the second phase. Religion and society continue. Therefore, again we should adhere to the second principle which is also an Islamic principle, the principle of council and allegiance.

This is the principle which today all of the intellectuals of the third world, Latin America, Africa, Asia and especially the countries which have most recently become independent are basing their societies upon. They believe in this principle.

That is, they have a revolution. Through the help of their intellectuals and thinkers, they get rid of the colonizers and they free their society. Later, when they want to build their society, they see that if they act according to the votes of the people and rely upon them, these people are people who sell their vote for a nickel. They

get together a hundred votes by offering them hot soup.

In a tribe of five or ten thousand people, where all ten thousand people have one vote, that vote belongs to the chief. If you buy out the Khan (he can usually be bought out with a coat or a bangle), you have 10,000 votes. Thus when the enemy is strong and a society has not yet been shaped and it has a tribal or group pattern, someone has influence and he fixes the votes, and in that society, there are people with power, respect, force, wealth and influence. The individuals in the mass of society still do not have the freedom of vote or have not developed a political awareness. In such a society, the revolutionary leader has done away with the colonizers and has freed society. But the society has still not been shaped. The prior factors still exist in addition to external enemies who encourage them. Therefore, if we want to elect a leader by public vote, the person who is elected will only serve the enemy.

This is why in these societies, they do not give the leadership into the hands of the people who know nothing about leading. They keep the revolutionary group who began the revolution. For a time, a stage exists which is called 'revolutionary,' or 'democracy engaged in social action,' which is ruled by the revolutionary group and the generation after the revolutionary group chosen by the revolutionary

leader. They rule the people even without the vote of the people. Until when? Until the time when the votes of the people are equal to the real number of people in the population. Democracy means leadership by means of allegiance and council by election. This is one principle of Islam but only in societies where the leaders each have one vote as well. But if 10,000 people watch and see what so and so says or so and so does, these 10,000 people are not 10,000 votes. Thus, in the society at the time of the Prophet, which had been built in a period of 10 years, the aristocrats were still alive, the elders were more respected than the younger men. We saw that the Prophet promoted Zeid ibn Osameh and his martyred father. They were as dear to him as his own eyes. He was so full of admiration for this father and son that the Prophet did not yield under the protest of the elders who said, 'he is only 18 years old and too young.'

This habit is still present in the 20th century and in our societies. They say, 'It is true he is more worthy and virtuous, more willing, more realistic, more brave and more aware, but he is too young and does not have enough experience.

They prefer an old, weak, sick-man who can hardly move and has to be picked up and carried over a younger man. We today still think in the same way.

The society of Medina, at that time, was similar to the present societies of Africa, Latin America and Asia, which are beginning to come out of the pressure of decline, colonialism, and lack of awareness. They have a revolutionary period during which time a revolutionary leadership exists, not a democratic leadership based on public votes.

During this temporary period, they try to arm society from the inside and develop the society's political awareness to such an extent as to make the members of that society independent. Political, intellectual and ideological characteristics are in the process of being developed in order to be able to eliminate the external enemy and remove the internal and external agents.

After that, a progressive society is formed where each person has an independent vote and the ability to make political distinctions. Such a society has arrived at the stage of allegiance and council by election. This society has reached a stage where people gather around each other, everyone consulting with the other one, and by recognizing the best person, not because of influence, wealth or power of this or that one, gives an independent vote.

But a society which is still not developed, where the votes are still tribal, clan or family, consisting of Emigrants and Companions, to

rely on such a social grouping is to rely on the enemy controlled public vote and public life because society has not had time for political, intellectual, social or religious development. They sell themselves, their destiny and their future cheaply. That's the way it is!

Thus we must accept the fact that a society, shaped within a ten year period, cannot, from a cultural and individual point of view, be fully formed in such a short period of time.

The Islamic society is an established community in which every individual is an independent person, with the ability to make distinctions and is the controller of his or her vote.

Thus after the Prophet of Islam, the ten years of his work should have been extended to 100 years more, 150 years, 200 years. It should have continued until Islamic society became a society where each individual, without influence or pressure from others, could vote and vote correctly. This is why (and certainly it is logical) that after the Prophet, instead of the Umayyad Caliphate and the Abbasid Caliphate, instead of Yazid, Hosein would have come. Instead of Mo'awiyeh, Hasan would have been the successor and would have ruled instead of Soffah, Imam Baqer, instead of Marwan, Imam Jaffar Sadeq.

If it had taken this form, after 250 years, under their leadership, Islamic society would have been governed by people like this. We would have had elections. People could have chosen the most suitable person because they would have had social growth and then the public vote and public allegiance could not have been played with and mocked after 30 years of Mo'awiyeh by appointing Yazid as his hereditary Caliph.

Thus my objection is not allegiance and council by election (this is my personal opinion), not to the principle of appointment by selection. The principle of appointment by selection, according to Shi'ites, is a reality which exists in history, it is a logical and rational truth which was necessary and it should have been this way.

And allegiance and council by election, which our brothers emphasize, from the point of view of sociology, humanity and the seeking of freedom, is a progressive principle which exists in Islam and in the Traditions of the Prophet.

But here I only want to say that the elections which were held immediately after the death of the Prophet in Saqifeh, should have taken place 250 years later.

Epilogue

WE SEE that the problem of Imamate is not only a belief in 12 pious men, but it is a belief in a human, lasting regime as opposed to other kinds of regimes. It is not a belief in something that merely happened and as some say, can now be discarded. We are not looking to go back to the past and old hostilities because this would be a betrayal of Islam, the Sunnis, the Shi'ites and to all humanity. We are not looking to create disunity. We do not want to re-create the spitefulness of the past, ever.

Not only do we seek to avoid creating disunity, but more importantly we are striving to establish a powerful unity so that our Sunni brothers no longer make us out to be forgerers nor do we condemn them as apostates.

This factor exists which gives truth to Shi'ism, but it does not exist in a corner of Islam but rather it itself is a part of understanding the whole of Islam and it also provides an understanding of the present as well.